

## « Wake up, stand up ... »

COLLECTIVE MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS OF THE BIOVISION FORUM, March 2005

**“The majority of the problems faced by humanity are caused solely by humanity itself”.**

The Dialogues en humanite event **aims** to place the issue of Man and humanity at the core of their considerations. It brings together people with diverse backgrounds and knowledge and provides them with a chance to exchange points of view.

Scientists, manufacturers, members of civil society, political leaders **and heads of associations who attended the Dialogues en humanite seminar on “the revolution of living matter”**, have decided to send a message to Biovision stakeholders.

### INDICATORS

Will new discoveries on living matters create the conditions for a better life? In this field, there are many scientific, technical, economic and social challenges - and therefore greater challenges in the ethical and political domain as well.

Knowledge and technology have expanded at an exponential pace. However, man’s ability to act wisely has barely developed at all. Worse still, our societies have stopped questioning the purposes of human action. What will Man do with the immense knowledge and power that he has acquired?

What is considered “possible with economic ends” is not in itself a legitimising factor for action. The issue is therefore to separate what can and what should be done. To make an informed decision, two levels of debate are needed:

- A scientific debate on knowledge and technology;
- An ethical and democratic debate on human issues and values at stake in the decisions to be made.

Man’s increased knowledge and power on living organisms, the development of agriculture and the health sector have paved the way for remarkable progress. However, current challenges call for urgent solutions: without the sharing of knowledge, without democratic debate, without the reducing inequality, humanity is liable to “hit a brick wall”. It has become a matter of urgency to take the needs and demands of all populations as the starting point, rather than creating solutions for solvent markets only.

The Dialogues en humanite programme requests the various Biovision stakeholders to address certain critical issues.

## **AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION**

### **Increase without destroying**

Satisfying world hunger calls for an increase in production – and therefore in productivity – but under certain conditions, namely preserving local production systems, developing the agricultural sector in the poorest countries and favouring their autonomy. Having first-world agro-food industries providing food-supplies is neither a technical solution, nor a political gain.

Without prior protection of local markets, technical solutions are ineffective, even counterproductive. This protection is inherent in local and regional agricultural policies, based on food crops and protected from often pernicious market influences.

The balance in agricultural research must be kept under control so as to favour developing countries, by prioritising their real needs.

### **Preserving the environment**

The emergence of technology bringing about qualitative disruption in the nature of the organism (GMO, biotechnology, synthetic biology, etc.) poses new problems in terms of the environment and health. This technology must be examined in the light of the tangible progress that it has provided.

The notion of an ecological footprint allows us to gauge environmental impact both worldwide (greenhouse gas) and locally (fertiliser, plant protection products).

Production must be assured through sustainable means:

- Start with possible developments in local agricultural systems, and not just technologies developed in Northern countries,
- take into account energy and environmental balance (production, trade, transport, etc.)

### **Stipulate what constitutes the heritage of humanity**

World water, energy and food resources are all part of the shared heritage of humanity.

We must establish an inventory of knowledge and technology that cannot be patented and declare it the heritage of humanity.

Research and development relating to these fields are to be prioritised. Access to resulting discoveries must be open to all.

### **Nourishing human relationships**

For proper nourishment, each person needs 2,700 to 2,900 calories per day of healthy foods, starting with water. But food cannot be reduced to a scientific concept. It is the essence of a feeling of belonging to a family, a city or a civilisation – a feeling that is so vital for human beings. Food is also about socializing, pleasure and culture.

## **GOOD HEALTH FOR ALL**

### **Defining health**

Health is not only “the silence of the organs”, the lack of illness. According to the very broad definition, and yet the only realistic one from the World Health Organization in 1947, it is “**a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being**”.

### **Fighting the market for a basic right**

Health is a right. It is also a market which is booming and particularly attractive for shareholders. It has a cost, but it is also a lever for development.

According to the market, access to healthcare is only available for solvent consumers (in the South, but also in the North). According to the basic public right, which is the right to health, this limited access to healthcare is unacceptable.

This calls for a system that would redistribute profits from the health economy so that the right to good health may apply to all, thereby erasing the differences between social groups and between countries. We formally demand that drug companies participate in a redistribution system which is both effective and fair.

### **Promoting sustainable systems**

The universal nature of the right to health – and therefore to healthcare – goes hand in hand with the cultural differences in health models. Beyond basic scientific expertise, equality and solidarity should lead to independent, autonomous and sustainable health systems across borders, which take into account the wishes and different cultures of citizens and peoples.

### **Instilling democracy in health**

The issue of health, like that of nutrition, is too important to be left to specialists alone.

It is urgent to instil a type of democracy in health and research policies which takes its lead from local, regional and global expertise. This calls for government, as well as associations (non-profit organisations), to play a major role.

### **Simplify in order to act**

Decreasing high mortality rates and curbing the most common diseases do not necessarily require high tech products. Hygiene, drinking water, a balanced diet and prevention depend just as much on cultural approaches as on technical and scientific ones. In the West, “mental and social” malaise does not call for medication first. To treat and prevent this chronic illness we must question man’s humanity. While prevention and immunisation are key factors for universal health, humanisation is another equally important factor.

## TAKE POWERFUL SYMBOLIC ACTIONS

The only way to provide solutions to the challenges standing in the way for the revolution of living matter is to seek them collectively through scientific examination, debate between properly informed citizens and bold and responsible decision makers & players in the economic and political spheres. This takes time, but time is running out. We must take strong and symbolic actions without a moment's delay. We propose actions in three domains:

### Adopting a new approach towards GMOs

GMO crops represent over 5 % of cultivated land today. Regardless of the debate they have sparked in Europe, the increased involvement of China and India in this form of technology makes the effects difficult to reverse. We have to stop the vicious circle that prevents any dialogue on the matter. We propose:

1. Identifying an area of general interest which is liable to be solved by GMOs;
2. Opening the debate to assess the risks and the advantages of the technology and approaches envisioned in this field;
3. Launching (in the event of a positive decision) a major worldwide public research programme accessible to all, based on a motivational objective.

### Financing access to medication

This concerns the multinational pharmaceutical companies. They must recognise and determine a “maximum” profitability threshold. Beyond this, a **percentage** of their excess profits **could be** put into a fund providing access to medication for the populations of economically disadvantaged countries, creating the first steps for a “global health insurance”.

### Develop industrial protection

Intellectual property is inextricably linked to research carried out by private companies. However, in the field of life sciences, companies must recognise two principles:

1. Elements made of living matter cannot be patented if they have not been transformed; which means that genes cannot be patented as they are.
2. Public interest research must not be blocked by patents held by third parties in the private or public sectors.

**One of the major threats looming over this new millennium – which was dubbed as “evil” by the philosopher Simone Weil during her time – is the substitution of the means for the end. With all of the debates that we are faced with today, we should be careful not to lose sight of the fact that the only end that we can recognise is man. Technology – regardless of the terrific future it promises (the word “terrific” coming from the Latin “terrificus” meaning “causing terror or fear”) – will remain a means, unless we renounce humanity as we know it.**

**Today more than ever before, it is necessary to set up a new form of governance which is both local and worldwide, as this alone is able to offer all sectors of society a level of representation, debate and control.**

**In such complex matters with such unpredictable developments and consequences, scientific expertise is vital as the means to enlighten the public and democratic debate, but such debate is the only legitimate way to decide on such matters.**